

Christian Downey

Hog Creek Review



Dinner at the Smith-Malbec's

Cast:

Joe Smith-Malbec

Liz Smith-Malbec

Setting:

A small eat-in kitchen of a very clean apartment. The table is set for what seems to be a romantic dinner. There is a bottle of wine and some bronze candle sticks on the table. We see a woman working at the counter cutting something. She is dressed like a 50s house wife.

(Joe enters the house with a big smile and dressed in a suit carrying a briefcase.)

JOE: Hi honey, I'm home!

(Liz looks up at him, with a psychotic look on her face; she rushes at him with the knife she is holding. She lunges the knife at his head. He barely moves in time. The knife sticks in the wall. As he looks at the knife, she notices and they both wrestle to get it. Joe ends up getting it.)

JOE: What the fuck, Liz?

LIZ: Joe, you've been talking to our students again.

(Joe's look of surprise turns to recognition.)

JOE: It's a creative writing class, I tell them stories to inspire them, get them to write.

LIZ: They don't have to be about me; about us.

JOE: I don't understand what the problem is.

LIZ: No, you never understand. You never think about my feelings. How does it make me look to them? Am I really that difficult to get along with? If I were so picky, why did you marry me in the first place?

JOE: (chuckling) Ahh, you heard about the blouse.

LIZ: It has nothing to do with the damn blouse. It has everything to do with the way you made me appear.

JOE: Honey, it was just a story, something to get the creative juices flowing to write a parody. Give them a base to work from, find humor in life. In my defense, you were very picky about that Christmas gift. The premise fit so well into my lesson plan.

LIZ: Inspire them, making me the butt of your jokes? I teach them also don't forget. I have to see their faces staring back, wondering if they are thinking I am a daemon from the underworld as I am trying to teach them romantic poetry. I hear what they say in the hall outside my office, the quiet whispers as they pass, thinking I can't hear them. The laughs from the learning center as I descend the stairs to teach my next class or go to lunch.

JOE: They are kids, they talk.

LIZ: (interrupting) They are OUR STUDENTS, some things should remain private. Our lives should be just that, OURS, not subject for public fodder. And what am I supposed to do when one is brave enough to come tell me these stories you have told them? Just laugh it off, act like it never happened? Should I take a page from your book? Maybe once in awhile talk about you and how you proposed? Tell them, most women are wooed like 19th century nobility, but instead of a sonnet, I received, *would you like to lower your tax burden?* Your humor may have won me over then, but it has become irritating now.

And after all I have done for you! Taking a research sabbatical so you could teach my classes. We both know you needed to show the administration you deserved tenure. I gave up my life here and moved to godforsaken backwater Louisiana so you would have a chance at tenure.

JOE: Yeah, after Dr. Johnson had to show up with his Oxford degree and young shining face and stole it away from me the first time. That should have been my spot. I mean, I have published eight books to his one. Just because the department needs eye-candy with a fake British accent to attract students does not make him qualified.

LIZ: You need to stop blaming everyone else for your shortcomings, Joe. Take credit for your failings.

JOE: And do pray tell me what you think those are, Mrs. Perfect?

LIZ: Oh, have you forgotten my article debacle? All you had to do was write one decent review of my work and you couldn't even take that seriously. After all I have

sacrificed for your education and school?

JOE: So St. Liz is going to grace us with her presence now?

LIZ: What? My working as a server at night to pay your way through graduate school and teaching dreaded English comp, and trying to find time to finish my dissertation while you spent your time out of class writing poetry doesn't count? It's not like you were making us rich with your \$17 royalty checks.

JOE: You forget I was teaching also. And I gave you a good review on your article for that so the tenure committee would approve you.

LIZ: You mean that sarcastic shit you wrote? Your review did nothing to help me. They could see the cutting remarks between the lines.

JOE: I can't help that you chose the driest period in British Literature to focus on. I mean, who cares about provincial life in 19th century Britain?

LIZ: Well, at least Dr. Johnson did, being the deciding vote if I received the spot.

JOE: Here we go again with wonderful Dr. Johnson. Just because he studies the same era as you does not make him a god.

LIZ: You know we needed me to get that tenure placement so I could help keep you working at the university. That was the pact. Your cutting edge poetry wasn't going to get you in the Department Chair's good graces. He couldn't even stand your work. My making tenure allowed me to be on the faculty selection board, thus saving your job and our house.

JOE: Not like you made it any easier for me. You wouldn't even let me know what the other four had been saying about me and my chances.

LIZ: You know I couldn't do that. If any of them had found out, I risked losing my job, and where would we have been then? You know that I did all I could to convince them so you could get where you are now. You received your tenure, if only probationary. And this is the way you repay me? Making me the butt of all your jokes?

Didn't you know that this would happen? I mean you joked about it in class already. Told the students I was growing night crawlers and you would soon be food for the worms in our basement. Deep down you knew it would come to this one day, even if only subconsciously.

JOE: I'm sorry, I didn't think, I don't think sometimes. The stories just escape, they want to get out. They are in my poetry, my journal, and my classes. They have a life of their own, they want to live like you or I. I can't stop them, they force their way out into the world like my children.

LIZ: It needs to stop. I don't know how much more of this I can take. I don't know how much more of this I should have to take. Most people would have left at half of the things you have put me through.

JOE: I know, I promise I will try harder to stop. I will make the best attempt that is humanely possible to think of you before I open my mouth. Your feelings will become my feelings, our feelings. I don't want us to fight anymore. Can we go back to the way we were, the graduate students so in love, ready to take on the world around them?

LIZ: Let's just eat. I am tired of talking. Tired of all the promises.

(Joe looks at the table for the first time and his face looks confused. He drops the knife to the floor.)

JOE: Is that the bottle of wine we were saving and the fine china we got for a wedding gift?

(Liz does not answer. A look of understanding covers Joe's face.)

JOE: It's our anniversary?

LIZ: Yes, and once again you forgot. Let's just eat; your favorite meal, veggie loaf, is getting cold.

(They sit to eat. Joe's head hangs low in defeat. He takes a few bites and gets a look as if something is wrong. He begins to fall forward and his head lands on the table, eyes open and staring at the audience. He doesn't move as he is dead. Liz gets a menacing grin across her face as she looks at him. She reaches over and shuts his eyelids.)

LIZ: I knew the knife would never work.